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ABSTRACT

A study examined the use of three linguistic features imitating speech found in two groups of direct-mail marketing texts, in order to show differences in the ways U.S.-based and transnational efforts exploit readers' expectations regarding "literate" versus "oral" modes of expression. Two groups of sales letters, 25 U.S.-based domestic and 25 U.S.- or foreign-based international, were analyzed for occurrence of three features: direct quotes and reported speech; use of colloquialisms and idioms; and emphatic particles and intensifiers. Results indicate that the domestic letters were twice as long, but the international letters averaged more words per sentence and differed in frequency of occurrence of other organizational features. Foreign-based international letters tended toward British usage and spelling. No U.S.-based international letters contained direct speech. Further research in this area is suggested, and it is recommended that business and foreign language educators be aware of how different writing styles affect presentation of the same information. A list of letter sources and a 47-item bibliography are appended. (MSE)

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ESTABLISHING READER INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSNATIONAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS: RELATIVE FOCUS ON SPEECH-LIKE OR WRITTEN-LIKE STRATEGY

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Establishing reader involvement in transnational marketing communications: Relative focus on speech-like or written-like strategy

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Introduction:

In the United States, next to the personal sales call, direct mail advertising is the most effective medium a marketer can use to put a message in front of prospective buyers (Bovee and Arens, 1982). This success has created a $21 billion industry generating about $170 billion annually in sales, with 12 of the top 250 mail order companies generating $1 billion or more in annual worldwide sales and 136 companies having at least $100 million in annual worldwide sales[1].

Importantly, the international segment of the market is expanding, propelled by recent technological advances in international networks, and increased global marketing development in U.S.-based and foreign-based mail order companies. Several economic factors have contributed to the attractiveness of international direct marketing, among them: increased foreign demand for a wide variety of products, increased competition for markets, and the vast foreign markets that have not been exposed to state-of-the-art direct marketing techniques that have been developed in the highly innovative and competitive U.S. market (Weed 1989).

The opportunities for growth in the industry is astounding: the countries of Western Europe encompass a market of approximately 360 million people, and the Asia Pacific market is comprised of nearly 1.5 billion people, together representing a population of potential consumers with a discretionary income equalling or exceeding that of consumers in the United States. And, the nature of the medium contributes to its potential: it is the most selective of media, the execution and implementation of programs is highly controllable, and the responses or transactions are measurable.

Yet, to successfully market by mail "transnationally", that is, other than within the borders of one's nation, and selling products and services which can originate anywhere and are largely oblivious to differences in national markets (Ralston 1988), one must still have a grasp of the ways cross-cultural differences in communication shape differences in message content and execution. These differences may be critical in their impact on communicative outcomes, because although the factors behind the success of global market development through program geographic expansion can be attributed to worldwide similarities in markets and lifestyles, experts agree that the success of international marketing may depend on advertisers' ability to consider communication subtleties when developing cross-cultural advertising, in order to create culturally 'acceptable' texts, i.e., they must "think globally and act locally" (Wind 1986)

Clear evidence of the global diffusion of English and modern marketing theory and practice, underscored by America's position as the global capital of advertising, worldwide trends which indicate that advertisers are routinely pushing back the boundaries of the

conventional and permissable (Sherry 1987:177), and current patterns of global expansion in the direct mail industry, suggest that U.S.-based firms will be providing prototypical models for future foreign mail-order campaigns, and that English will be progressively more attractive a language choice in that expansion.

The major difference between U.S. based company mail order global market development and that of foreign-based companies has been between program-oriented expansion for U.S. companies and acquisition by foreign-based companies. Models for U.S.-based company global mail order development have been established by companies expanding the geographic distribution of collectible and publishing programs. On the other hand, models of global market development for foreign-based companies have been established by mail order and non-mail order conglomerates through acquisition of U.S. companies (Fishman 1989).

At the same time, the factors behind the success in U.S. and some foreign companies in global direct mail markets includes the spread of English. U.S. companies have, and will continue, to focus on the base of developed Commonwealth countries sharing English as the primary language, the substantial international educated universe sharing English as the secondary language, and the international export and acceptance of U.S. entertainment, information products and cultural influences (p. 36). Thus, a lack of understanding of the effects of socio-linguistic subtleties on prospective responses may critically jeopardize a marketer's success.

In this paper I examine the use of particular linguistic features found in two different groups of direct mail texts, to address an aspect of sales messages that characterizes American direct mail communica-

tions, and which exemplifies just those communication subtleties that may jeopardize a marketer's success. Specifically, the research focuses on three 'spoken-like' linguistic strategies used in American domestic and international direct mail sales letters, to show differences in the ways U.S.-based and transnational efforts exploit readers' expectations regarding 'literate' versus 'oral' modes of expression.

Among the features which have been identified as typically 'speech-like' are direct quotes and reported speech; the use of colloquialisms, idioms, and collocations; and emphatic particles and intensifers. In what follows, I first provide background information for understanding the aims of the study, and describe the data and method. Then I present my findings for the three features selected for analysis, and interpret the differences and similarities between the groups of data. The nature and relative frequency of occurrence of these phenomena are discussed, as are the implications of the findings for Western marketers.

The problem, data and methodology

Although on their surface sales letters used across cultures may appear to be similar in their form and function, some rhetorical and structural differences previously noted for ordinary business letters used in cross-cultural contexts (e.g., Jenkins and Hinds 1987) have also been demonstrated in sales letters in English used to market products internationally, by both foreign-based and U.S. firms (Frank 1988, 1989a).

These results, and a survey instrument designed to explore native and non-native English speaker perceptions of differences between ordinary business correspondence and marketing letters (Frank 1990b) support previous research which has shown that readers' intuitions regarding communicative effect are crucial, and differ across cultures (e.g., Bouton 1988, Smith 1987, Smith and Nelson 1985), and that pragmatic differences in understanding, and culturally related differences in expectations about how the English language should be used, provide opportunities for miscommunication (e.g., Gumperz 1977, Scollon and Scollon 1981, Haneda and Shima 1981).

The present study further extends my ongoing study of marketing communications media (mail order catalogs, for example 1990a, and magazine advertising print media, 1989c), by further applying discourse analysis procedures to investigate linguistic strategies and discourse features which may be definitional of American and/or transnational direct response communications.

Elsewhere (1989b, 1990c) I have argued that American readers' expectations regarding language proficiency in direct mail sales letters place high high relative focus on 'involvement', fragmentation, and situational context; these are communicative strategies which have been linked to, or which are said to be characteristic of, 'spoken' language as opposed to 'written language' (Biber 1988, Chafe 1982, chafe and Danielewicz 1987). That is, American sales letters can be typified by the high value placed on 'speech-like', or oral/spoken (as opposed to literate/written) use of the language. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that effectiveness in these communications is related to the

degree to which the letters manifest this kind of 'orality' in a writing mode.

Furthermore, the overall results of this research support experts' advice on copywriting and sales letters, to be found in numerous American trade publications, copywriting manuals and guides, and advertising texts. In these publications, there is concensus on the basic strategy for writing effective direct mail letters; they should be written in a "conversational" style, and copywriters are exhorted to "write as you speak".[3]

In part, this paradigm for success may be attributed to the person-to-person on-site sales call, as circumscribed by Western rhetorical traditions, and as framed by American 20th century advertising traditions (Fox 1985). This is borne out by the way direct response advertising is often positioned as a separate promotional mix element; that is, it is a hybrid "the synthesis of which provides a separate concept combining characteristics of both advertising and personal selling" (Self et al. 1987:51).

In this way, the 'impersonalization' of general, mass advertising is offset in direct marketing by concepts associated with 'personal' selling: immediacy, flexibility, interactivity. The implementation of these concepts then, logically, may be expected to yield written texts (somewhat impersonal) displaying some characteristics of personal, face-to-face, two-way communications (personal selling).

Another explanation for this phenomena, which provides the theoretical framework for analyzing the data, is that some written genres have been shown to be more 'speech-like' using these and other features as criteria; for instance, novels, and personal correspondence

(Biber 1988 and elsewhere). From this perspective, the data here is a 'mixed' genre in the sense that it in part draws its communicative strength from a blending of oral and written modes of expression.

Our notions regarding the close relationship between 'orality', as we define it, and conversational-like involvement, and what letters in this genre should sound and look like (e.g., Tannen 1985, 1986a, 1989 and elsewhere) may also be culturally related (Besnier 1988). Besnier has argued that the structural relationships of spoken and written language must be explained in terms of the social context of orality and literacy in different literacy traditions.

Thus, Leech's (1966) claim, put forward in his seminal work on British advertising language, that there are genres of discourse which are intended to be simulations of extempore speech, and that such genres manifest realism to the extent that it is desirable, must be viewed in light of different cultural norms for language use, and different reader perspectives. This is borne out by Biber's (1987) demonstration of systematic differences between British and American written texts with respect to two underlying textual dimensions: American written genres are consistently more colloquial and involved than British written genres.

While there is not extensive linguistic research on these differences, and the research dealing with spoken/written differences remain controversial, these related findings of cross-cultural differences lend further support to the direction taken in this study, and reinforce the implications of the results, a point which will be further elaborated in later discussion.

Given the above, it would be logical to expect that sales letters originating in the U.S. and mailed to U.S. recipients would conform to the American model, in that they would (a) simulate personal correspondence, in terms of format and general organization, and (b) evidence use of the 'speech-like' features selected for analysis. Similarly, based on findings cited above, it would also be predicted that transnational mailers would design their sales letters to match *different* reader expectations, in that they would (a) conform to traditional differences between British (RP) and American English, and (b) would manifest different communicative strategies, suggestive of differential expression of communicative intent, and differential exploitation of reader expectations with regard to the role of 'speech-like' features in sales messages.

To test these claims, a convenience sampling of two groups of sales letters were analyzed, 25 letters in each group, as follows:

Group (1): U.S. or foreign-based sender and foreign recipient (TRANS)

Group (2): U.S.-based sender and U.S. recipient (US/US)

Direct speech, colloquial and informal expressions, and informal intensifiers and emphatics are among the cluster of indicators of involvement in more spoken-like language (Chafe 1982, Chafe and Danielewizc 1987) and have been identified as co-occurring with other features which, such as contractions and questions, that indicate a more interactional versus informational focus (e.g., Biber 1986, Tannen 1984). A previous study also has shown these two features to be less evidenced in direct mailings to non-U.S. recipients. Frank (1989a) found that sales letters sent to non-

American targets show far less use of contractions and questions than used and expected by U.S. writers and readers.

Based on this evidence it was therefore expected that Group 1 (TRANS) letters would show a similar pattern with regard to the use of direct speech, colloquialisms, and intensifiers. That is, they would show evidence of more formality, and less casual speech, in comparison to the Group 2 (US/US) letters.

The corpus was chosen to be representative of the kinds of everyday offers to be found in mailboxes in the U.S., West Germany, and Israel.[3] All the letters are in English. Also, all 50 letters fall into the same top and middle size consumer product categories (publishing: subscriptions, magazines, books and records.[4]

Group 1 consists of transnational offers; that is, solicitations to purchase a product that have crossed national boundaries. Group 2 consists of domestic direct mail letters; that is, both the originating company and the prospective consumer are in the United States.[5] Details are provided in Appendix A.

1. Direct quotes and reported speech

In literature, as in non-literary texts such as direct mail letters, speech can be represented in various ways. Leech and Short (1981) among others, have proposed systematic categorization of the ways speech and thought can be presented. These essentially divide all such representations into either direct or indirect speech.

To illustrate the difference between the two, I offer the following example of 'direct' speech in print, and its hypothetical 'indirect' equivalent. In example (a) the copywriter provides a further reason for subscribing to the publication, by giving readers an idea of the contents (brackets identify the source, see Appendix A):

a) direct speech

> They treasure the LRB for the classic literary battles in its correspondence columns, like the now famous and fierce exchanges between Tom Paulin and Craig Raine over Geoffrey Hill (Craig Raine: "I cannot argue with an amoeba." Tom Paulin: "Corner Craig Raine and he becomes merely abusive." [2: LRB]

b) indirect speech

> . . . over Geoffrey Hill, in which Craig Raine said he couldn't argue with an ameoba, and which Tom Paulin countered by saying if you cornered Craig Raine he would become merely abusive.

Only the first category, direct speech, and related categories (discussed below) are relevant to this study. That is because direct quotes are claimed as a 'speech-like' rather than 'written-like' feature (Chafe 1982, also Redeker 1984) which reflect the greater involvement of speakers with their listeners compared to writers and readers.

Every time a copywriter, like a novelist, wishes to convey an impression of the use of speech, he or she is forced to make a conscious or unconscious choice between the various forms available. In the fictional world of the copywriter, the choice will determine how close to, or remote from, a simulation of 'actual words spoken' the presentation of speech will be. For the most part, copywriters opt to be dramatic, and, by the use of direct speech and quotations, allow the characters in the sales story to 'speak for themselves'.

In addition to suggestions that the writer is speaking directly to the reader, generally understood by readers on the basis of their empirical knowledge of how conversation works, and signalled by the use of the conventions of written dialogue, there are overt attempts to mimic, or imaginatively reconstruct, the speech of readers addressing the copywriter. These may take the form of dialogue pair parts, such as questions and/or responses

> You're probably asking yourself "who's (name of firm)?"

or more rarely, commands

> Say "yes" to our offer.

Beyond these uses of direct speech, and also indicated by quotation marks, are related instances of quoted anecdotes and remarks, and testimonials. Copywriting manuals are generally in agreement regarding their value: "If you have believable testimonials, use them. As third party endorsements, they can be more persuasive tan anything the client could say for himself. (Kuswa 1979;109); "A quotation from an eminent individual will arouse interest if the authority is known (Shurter 1971); Use copy with actual testimonials of customers and buyers, and experts on the subject matter (Siedlecki 1984).

Analysis of the two groups of letters revealed that authorial use of quotation marks was inconsistently applied by Group 2 writers. That is, these marks were not necessarily used to indicate direct speech, as in the following unmarked declaration:

> When I say to you: I can do. . .

and they also were used extensively to highlight expressions, as in:

> It's our "thank you" for saying "yes" now

To be considered an example of direct speech the wording would be changed to:

"Thank you" for saying "yes" now

Furthermore, author originating direct speech is problematic because American sales letters are frequently written in first person narrative style, ordinarily unmarked (Frank 1990c). For example:

> My name is -----, and if you've ever read my nationally syndicated newspaper column or any of my books, you know that I don't make rash statements or promises.

However, for the most part, indirect speech could be distinguished from direct speech, speakers other than the author were identified by quotation marks, and direct *thought* and well as direct *speech* was represented this way. Based on the foregoing considerations, and exclusions, uses of direct speech in the transnational and domestic groups of letters were classified as following:

Type 1: Instances of declarative statements "as [x] said, "....."

Type 2: Instances of dialogic pair parts (questions and/or answers)

Type 3: Instances of imperatives (say "x")

Type 4: Instances of testimonials

The letters were then analyzed for use of these types of direct speech, and the two groups of letters were compared for similarities and differences. To provide a framework for analysis, Table 1. reports the occurrences of direct speech in the letters.

	# using DS	Total DS uses	Ave usage per letter
Group 1	3 (12%)	9	.36
Group 2	8 (32%)	18	.72

Table 1. Occurrences of Direct Speech

As Table 1 shows, using direct speech as a criterion for conversationality, Group 2 letters are twice as 'speech-like' as their transnational counterparts, on the basis of how many instances of use were found in the letters.

Another way of comparing the rate of occurrences is to assess the frequency of forms per 1000 words; this would take into account discrepancies caused by the longer lengths of Group 2 letters (see Appendix A). By this measure, Group 2 still averaged double the number of uses of direct speech compared to Group 1, transnational letters: although these rates are low, they can be interpreted to mean that U.S. readers are likely to encounter an instance of direct speech in almost every sales letter offering a subscription to a publication or similar. And, almost three times as many U.S./U.S. as Transnational letters contained instances of use of direct speech.

Not all types of direct speech were equally popular, however. Table 2 shows the usage for the different forms.

	a)"as x said", quote	b)dialog, pr prts	c)directive (say x)	d)test'l
Group 1	4	0	0	5
Group 2	12	0	3	3

Table 2. Usage of different types of direct speech

As can be seen, both US/US and TRANS letters show the highest use in Type 1 (direct quotes: As X said, "----") and Type 4 (testimonials), while Type 2 (dialogue parts) and Type 3 (imperatives, commands) are far less frequently encountered.

While this sample is small, it is worthwhile to note that the patterns here are supported by a previous study which investigated a larger number of domestic sales letters (Frank 1990c). In that research, a judgement sampling of 100 letters was analyzed, and approximately 30% of the letters were found to contain instances of direct speech. Further, a control corpus of successful and unsuccessful letters was compared, to find that 57% of the more effective letters, and 38% of the less successful one, contained direct speech. This result suggests that American audiences respond well to this 'speech-like' feature.

Moreover, when the four types of direct speech are ranked from 'most' to 'least' frequently found, again the patterns found in the sets of letters used here emulate those of the larger group cited for the study above. This point is illustrated in Table 3., which shows the percentage of the total occurrences for each direct speech type, listed in order of their 'popularity'.

	Large sample N=100	Group 1 N=25	Group 2 N=25
1) "As x said"=	43%	16%	48%
2) Testimonials=	27%	12%	20%
3) Dialog=	17%	0	0
4) say "x"=	13%	0	12%

Table 3. Comparative popularity of different direct speech types

As Table 3 shows, the types of direct speech favored by copywriters as a whole are similar across the groups of the letters. On average, Type 1 direct speech ("as [x] said") is consistently the most popular in both groups of letters, while Type 3 directives "say [x]" and Type 2, "dialog" is relatively disfavored. Additionally, the strong similarity between the percentages for the small and comparatively much larger group of US/US letters lends credence to my conclusion that US/US and TRANS groups are distinct in their use of direct speech.

Because direct mail is edited text, created for the purpose of attracting readers, and with the explicit intent to persuade, it is not surprising to find that quotations and testimonials, prepared in advance and selected to support the selling proposition, are the most popular types of direct speech found in the texts.

Whether or not the context of advertising sales letters creates an environment in which readers are prepared to silently 'hear' simulated dialogue is an intriguing question which cannot be answered by this comparison. However, the experience of dramatized 'constructed' speech, whether arguably genuine (as in a testimonial) or purely invented, seems to be a positive one for American audiences, and less so for German and Israeli audiences, although the recipient of the letter may not be aware of these differences.

2. General and non-specific intensifiers and emphatic particles

Labov (1984) argues that adverbs are the most common of linguistic elements used to convey emotional intensity in spontaneous speech. He

defined intensity as "the expression of social orientation toward the linguistic proposition" (p. 44) and noted that the markers which can function to signal emotional intensity are an open class (p. 48; see also Quirk et. al 1973). Among the adverbial intensifiers Labov lists are 'really', 'so + Adj.', 'sure', 'just', and these items also overlap the general, informal intensifiers and emphatic particles (e.g., just, really, real + Adj., so + Adj.) identified by Biber (1985) and Chafe (1982) as occurring more frequently in spoken language.

Based on these sources, several words and phrases were identified for potential analysis. They included common emphasizers (really care, just can't understand, simply don't believe, actually send, of course) and amplifiers: the maximizers, which can denote the upper extreme of the scale (quite good, pretty special) and boosters, which denote a high point on the scale (so beautiful, real nice).

Table 4. compares the groups of letters by their overall frequency of use of representative intensifying words and expressions selected for analysis: *just, really, real + adj., so + adj., simply, of course, actually.* 'Simply' was chosen, so that it might be compared to the use of 'just'; a more informal, hence 'speech-like' word.

Letters	Pct. Letters w/None	Number of Items	Pct/1000 words
Group 1	52%	30	2.61
Group 2	0%	120	5.08

Table 4. Use of Intensifiers and Emphatics

As Table 4. shows, the situation with regard to use of intensifiers and emphatic particles is more extreme than that of direct speech. On the basis of this sampling, sales letters sent in the U.S. to U.S. targets a far higher degree of informality and casualness than their transational equivalents. A majority of TRANS letters contain no use of intensifiers, compared to 100% of US/US letters which do contain at least one of the items selected for analysis. Moreover, the frequencies of occurrence of these items, when balanced for the longer length of US/US letters (see Appendix A), are much higher for domestic letters; double the rate.

Yet, as in the types of direct speech chosen (see section 1) the writers of the letters were relatively consistent in terms of the ways they chose to use these words. Table 5. reports the raw scores, and the proportionate use of the terms within each group of letters, by source of letter, for each of the lexical items.

Terms	Number & Percent of Sample		Combined Number
	Group 1	Group 2	Pct of Total (N=50)
1. JUST	15/50%	71/59%	86/57%
2. REALLY	0/0%	15/13%	15/10%
3. REAL + ADJ.	1/3%	0/0%	1/1%
4. SO + ADJ.	6/20%	17/14%	23/15%
5. SIMPLY	6/20%	1/1%	7/4%
6. OF COURSE	0/0%	9/6%	9/6%
7. ACTUALLY	1/3%	7/6%	8/5%
8. QUITE	1/4%	1/1%	2/1%
	30/100	120/100%	150/100%

Table 5. Use of General Emphatics and Intensifiers

As Table 5. demonstrates, there is not too great difference between the groups of letters in the use of certain items. Both clearly evidence

highest frequency of use for 'just', with 'so + adj.' commanding a clearly more distant, and second place for both groups.

Moreover, the word 'just', for which the word 'simply' in all cases can be substituted, is more frequently found in the US/US letters, while 'simply' is clearly the preferred choice for transnational letter writers, as would logically be predicted to be the case, if these audiences are expecting formal, and more 'written-like' use of the language.

This finding supports claims that simple and short words, which are often related to advertising language, and prescribed in advertising copywriting manuals (e.g., Leech 1966:71; see also Caples 1974), may NOT necessarily be the more persuasive, although they may well be more 'speech like'. On the other hand, extremely colloquial 'real + adj', and extremely formal expressions, such as 'quite' are also rarely found in both groups. Hence, much, clearly, may rest on the audiences to whom these messages are targeted, so that a much larger sampling is needed to confirm whether informality - at least in some form - is traversing the globe.

Indeed, this study is not designed to take into account the extent to which formality and informality, with regard to emphasis and intensity, permeates these letters. For example, while not included in the tabulations, expressions such as (underlining for reference):

"you have only to tell us to. . . "

"But I would remind you that there's no obligation. . . "

in TRANS letters substitute for the relatively more informal forms in the US/US letters such as:

"just tell us to" or "simply tell us to"

"there's really no obligation"

Thus, although the more formal 'utterly amazed' or 'very possible', were as infrequent as the folksy 'mighty high cost', or 'downright enjoyable' in these letters, the range of words and expressions used to express enthusiastic involvement (Chafe 1982:47), and to heighten and or maximize the intensity of expression in these letters, is difficult to capture within narrow bounds.

Nevertheless, I would interpret these findings to point to some important trends in transnational mailings, among them, to date, a decided preference for avoiding American-like "hype".

3. Colloquialisms and idiomaticity

While linguists would agree that the discourse properties of advertising language extend beyond the use of isolated words and phrases, it is also accepted that what advertisers call "high pitch" (Burton 1983) is also characteristic of the genre. 'High pitch' refers to the more lively and exciting style of writing that communicates an immediacy, intensity and an 'aura of urgency' and it is one of American direct mail's most distinguishing characteristics, as many observers within and outside the field of advertising have noted.

While not all copy is highly saturated with idioms and colloquialisms, expressions which simulate the inventions and casualness of speech are often found in US/US sales letters (Frank 1990c), and they illustrate the premium placed by copywriters on exploiting the possibilities for freshness, despite a fixed stock of expressions -- much as speakers do in everyday conversation (Chafe and Danielewicz 1987:92).

Lexicographers and linguists agree that there is no satisfactory objective test for slang, idioms and colloquial expressions, especially with reference to their use out of context, and studies have differed in the lexical criteria used to measure 'informality'. For example, Biber (1985 and elsewhere) excluded formulaic and idiomatic expressions in his list of 11 features chosen to mark an informal, colloquial style of expression, Chafe and Danielewicz (1987) exclude slang, profanity and jargon from their estimates, while Tannen (e.g., 1989) includes a seemingly unbounded range of expressions, collocations, proverbs and fixed formulas in her discussions of the ways conversation is 'pre-patterned'.

At the same time, despite, or perhaps because of, their unique properties, many scholars, while acknowledging the grammatical unpredictability and analytic complexity of formulaic expressions, have been willing to identify them by subjective determinations and/or suggest typologies based on pragmatic purposes which are intuited (e.g., Chafe 1982, Chafe and Danielewicz 1987, Fillmore et al. 1988)

Moreover, regardless of differences in linguists' findings with regard to novelty in persuasive language, a preponderance of researchers agree that the use of cliches, slang, proverbs, familiar colloquialisms and formulaic, idiomatic or more or less fixed and pre-patterned expressions are a feature of informal speech and writing, and are more common to speech than writing.

I analyzed the sales letters for the use of colloquial, slang, and idiomatic vocabulary with the goal of assessing the frequency of use of a colloquial vocabulary within the corpus of letters.

Table 6 shows the frequency of use of these terms in the sets of letters. The percentage of letters which evidence some use of cited (i.e., listed in sources) colloquial, slang or idiomatic forms is higher for the US/US group of letters: 96%. However, there is little difference between the groups of letters in terms of how often these expressions occur, per 1000 words of text.

Type	Pct.	Total Items found	Occurrences/sentence
Group 1	68%	76	.12
Group 2	96%	199	.12

Table 6. Frequency of Use of Colloquialisms and Idioms

Again, as Table 6 shows, US/US letters are more informal and 'speech-like' in their use of language. While a majority of both groups of letters contain some colloquialisms, slang and idiomatic expressions, they are far more apt to be found in domestic, American sales letters than letters received by foreign recipients. However, when they are used, their frequency within the letters appears to be the same. Put another way, this kind of informality may be more conditioned by the copywriter's preferences (or style) and/or the image desired to be projected by the marketer of the product.

Of course, some variation can be attributed to the variety of English used. In British originating letters, one may find "do it straightaway" versus the American version "do it right away" although both may be considered colloquial.

Other expressions can also be added to this list, expressions which seem to alert readers to an advertising register. These formulaic expressions serve as associative 'cues'; by appearing time after time in direct sales vehicles, they may be said to have to play a role in orienting readers to this particular genre:

> No questions asked!
>
> Absolutely no risk or obligation!
>
> You have nothing to lose and everything to gain!
>
> Double your money back!

While these expressions were not entirely absent from TRANS letters, they rarely appeared, further substantiating the reluctance of copywriters to apply conventional, formulaic expressions when the audience is international. I speculate that appeals to more generalized audience may rely less on abstract concepts such as 'risk'; 'obligation'; and/or on 'minimizing the gamble', as opposed to 'maximizing one's luck', which implies that members of the audience are sophisticated, or shrewd enough to be weighing the veracity of the copywriter.

There is only a hint that U.S.-based copywriters, more than others, may be making this presumption, since 32% of the TRANS letters coming from the U.S. contain these kinds of expressions, yet they make up 24% of the letters in this group (see Appendix A). The sample is too small to generalize; however, the patterns tend to suggest that U.S. writers will least want to presume innocence on the part of readers, and this may be because they are being influenced by their experiences, i.e., the relatively more sophisticated U.S.

market which dictates that more attention be paid to assurance, and a harder sell.

4. Overall differences

Sales letters are considered by American direct mailers to be the 'centerpiece' of a direct mail package, and closely resemble personal correspondence in format; hence they generally have a formal salutation, body, and close, plus the frequent addition of postscripts. The contents of the letter, as well as the number of items included in the direct mail package, will vary depending on the audience and product. In addition, postal rates and regulations, which differ from country to country, affect the gross weight as well as the execution of the package.

The latter practical constraint in part explains why the group of US/US letters, compared to the TRANS letters, are twice as long. But it does little to explain why TRANS letters contain more words per average per sentence, and differ in the frequency of occurrence of other organizational features, despite the fact that all of these texts are considered sales 'letters'.

A count was made of the total number of words and sentences used per letter. The counts include wording in so-called Johnson boxes, postscripts, and marginal notes.[6] Additionally, certain expected organizational/formatting features were identified, coded by type, and counted. These were: postscripts, Johnson boxes (or 'teasers'), and salutations (see Appendix A)

It was found that US/US letters average 14 words per sentence, compared to TRANS letters' 18 words per sentence. Further, TRANS letters are less likely to evidence a postscript (52% vs. 72%), or Johnson box (40% vs 64%), both of which features are typical of American direct mailings.

In addition, the TRANS letters not originating in the U.S. seemed to rely on the British (RP) model, rather than American (AE) English with regard to spelling and common expressions. Conglomerates, as well as foreign-based companies, tend to follow the (potential safer? more acceptable?) RP model, perhaps in presumption that the 'model' international English-speaker - native or non-native - will find this more acceptable.

However, there is evidence that tactics can be combined: in one letter, the words emphasize (AE) and honours (RP) both were used; in another letter, there was found "emphasise" and "colourful" (RP) and "right away" (vs. straight away). These details, in combination with pragmatic strategies and lexical differences, however, imbue letters with an overall tone suggestive of either U.S. or foreign origination.

Conclusion

A question that naturally arises from this comparison of sales letters is whether U.S. originating direct mailings are more likely to conform to the American model, or adapt to the expectations of their audience. Supporting this conclusion would be my finding that of the six (of 25) letters which originate in the U.S., none contain direct speech. However,

this sampling of letters is too small to provide anything but a hint that 'audience design' may be worth pursuing in a future study.

Another provocative question, of course, is whether the targeted audience is composed of native or non-native English speakers. This information is important if strategies are being implemented to match the sociolinguistic norms and preferences of readers. This cannot be ascertained from the information out-of-hand, since as observed earlier there is a substantial number of educated English speakers internationally to whom these products are being marketed.

Perhaps all that may be concluded from the findings are that product, and audience, seem to be constraining the means and degree to which involvement strategies are realized in the texts. That is, copywriters appear to be creating their messages to take advantage of the pre-existing attitudes of their audience, and this has resulted in a differential use of language.

On the other hand, the findings strongly point to the need for further research in this area, and for the need for ESP (English for Special Purposes), as well as business and marketing communications educators to be aware of of how different writing styles influence the presentation of the same information. This is vital where persuasive discourse is concerned, since response is critical to the achievement of aims.

Although it has been argued that a standardized international advertising approach is justified, given the "convergence in consumer preference", and cost savings and economies of scale (Levitt 1983), there is ample anecdotal and empirical evidence to support the opposite view, despite commonalities in language and lifestyle across markets.

Universal approaches are problematic because social variables in combination with cultural values and attitudes are determinants of consumer behavior, so that markets are necessarily fragmented and non-homogeneous to mirror differences in prospective buyers' social beliefs, attitudes, and values (Fox 1985). Indeed, this is the basis of what is called "the marketing concept", which focuses on the needs of the buyer (rather than the seller) and holds that the key to achieving organizational goals consists in determining the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitiors (Kotler 1988).

There is strong agreement among observers that miscommunication largely accounts for business failures in the international scene (e.g., Fisher 1980, Ricks 1983, others), even when from our own perspective we are on our best behavior (Copeland and Griggs 1985), and we are ostensibly speaking the same language, as many cross-cultural studies have demonstrated. The following observation of Scollon and Scollon (1981:28), introducing the results of their comparative study of Native American and Anglo-American children's use of language, fairly accurately sums the problem:

> "The situation in which there is the greatest potential for problems is where the language being used by the two speakers is the most similar"

Notes

1,4. Statistics excerpted from "Mail order top 250+: The eighth annual statistical and qualitative survey of U.S. businesses using the mail order method of selling, highlighting 1988's mail order leaders, gainers and losers.", the cover story for Direct Marketing magazine, July 1989.

2. This is based on the advice of writers in a variety of sources, including columns and commentary in trade publications which regularly provide guidance to practitioners (e.g., Direct Marketing) as well as the numerous extant texts and 'how to' copywriting manuals.

3. My personal thanks to Lilith von Haynes University of Essen, and Joseph Reif (Bar Ilan University), for contributing the data used in this study.

5. Following previous researchers, I assume for the purposes of the study that the purpose (if not confirmed effect) of direct mail promotions is to persuade.

6. Johnson boxes or 'floating teasers' (main points of the offer summarized and set off above heading or salutation) are so-named for their creator, Frank Johnson, who popularized the device in his successful letters for American Heritage (Hodgson 1987:5). This is a frequently encountered opening device which provides a summary of the offer, and is positioned at the top of the letter, above the salutation. It takes the form of an indented paragraph and is ordinarily boxed or set off by asterisks, stars, or similar.

Detail: LIST of SOURCES Appendix A

	Source	Orig/Rec't	PS/Jnsn bx	Salutation	#Words	#Sents
1.	Financial Times	UK/Ger	yes/yes	executive	549	26
2.	London Review of Books	UK/Ger	yes/yes	reader	925	53
3.	Scientific American	US/Ger	no/yes	colleague	979	53
4.	HBRBusiness classics	US/German	no/no	colleague	433	25
5.	Longman/China	Hng Kng/Ger	no/no	reader	436	25
6.	Latin Am newsletters	UK/Ger	yes/yes	reader	580	20
7.	Intl Herald tribune	NDL/Ger	yes/yes	sir	339	20
8.	China Sources	Hng Kng/Ger	yes/yes	chscsrdr	248	16
9.	European Affairs	NDL/Ger	no/yes	reader	190	12
10.	Int'l business week	US/Ger	yes/yes	executive	986	53
11.	Good book guide svs	UK/Ger	yes/no	reader	560	25
12.	Wall st Journal Europe	NDL/Ger	no/yes	reader	618	38
13.	Am Bio Institute	US/Ger	no/no	biographee	520	30
14.	Int'l Bio Centre	UK/Ger	no/no	dr haynes	134	5
15.	Int'l Bio Centre	UK/Ger	no/no	friend	230	9
16.	Fortune	NDL/Isr	yes/no	list name	146	15
17.	Harv Bus Review	US/Isr	no/no	list name	181	13
18.	Economist	UK/Isr	yes/no	reader	359	23
19.	Sven Hed/Project manual	UK/Isr	yes/yes	executive	610	27
20.	Rivisti di Linguistica	Italy/Isr	no/no	-----	156	6
21.	Planetary Society	US/Isr	yes/no	friend	918	51
22.	The Guardian	UK/Isr	yes/no	reader	399	15
23.	Stump Cross Books	UK/Isr	no/no	colleague	286	25
24.	Time Life	NDL/Isr	yes/no	reader	260	22
25.	Fin Times Europe	NDL/Isr	no/no	executive	445	28
GROUP 1 TOTALS			13/10		11487	635
26.	Quality Paperbacks	US/US	no/no	bk lover	930	79
27.	Smithsonian	US/US	yesno	assoc	1572	80
28.	Scholastic mag	US/US	no/yes	educator	464	26
29.	Old House Journal	US/US	yes/yes	reader	1170	101
30.	Lears	US/US	yes/yes	contemp	1618	84
31.	Archaeology	US/US	no/no	subsr	174	7
32.	Southern Accents	US/US	yes/yes	subsr	1294	94
33.	Time Life books	US/US	no/no	reader	1130	59
34.	Boston Pub co	US/US	yes/yes	reader	1016	57
35.	Readers Digest	US/US	yes/yes	reader	1152	84
37.	Working Wom Mag	US/US	yes/yes	reader	1270	71
38.	Sroge	US/US	yes/yes	friend	865	61
39.	Mus heritage society	US/US	no/yes	mlover	216	6
40.	Sales Mktg mag	US/US	yes/no	exec	1300	99
41.	Playboy Mag	US/US	yes/yes	friend	990	60
42.	Scene mag	US/US	no/no	reader	552	86
43.	Encyclopedia. Brit	US/US	yes/yes	parent	770	45
44.	Mystery book club	US/US	yes/yes	reader	648	53
45.	Literary Guild	US/US	yes/no	reader	784	55
46.	Ideals mag	US/US	yes/yes	reader	1440	102
47.	Consumer Rpts	US/US	yes/yes	reader	2028	172
48.	Int'l Preview Society	US/US	yes/yes	mlvr	719	54
49.	Adv. cons	US/US	yes/yes	writer	531	34
50.	gard book club	US/US	yes/no	reader	987	61
GROUP 2 TOTALS			18/16		23620	1630

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